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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRETORIA 003486

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DEPT FOR AF/S S. HILL

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TAGS: PREL KDEM SF ZI

SUBJECT: MDC TREASURER BENNETT "CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC" ON SADC TALKS

REF: A. HARARE 858

1B. PRETORIA 3425

1C. TRENKLE-DELL EMAIL OF 4/25/07

1D. TRENKLE-WARREN EMAIL OF 9/7/07

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Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Donald Teitelbaum. Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY. The pressure is now on SADC facilitator Mbeki and ZANU-PF to deliver on reforms for the 2008 elections in Zimbabwe, argued MDC Treasurer Roy Bennett. Bennett, who said he was initially skeptical of the MDC-ZANU-PF agreement on Constitutional Amendment 18, stressed that the MDC remained ready to boycott the elections if ZANU-PF did not fulfill its part of the bargain. Mbeki hopes to conclude the MDC-ZANU-PF negotiations by October 15.

Raising private funds remains difficult for the MDC. Only USD 150,000 remain of a USD 1 million donation Bennett received earlier this year. Bennett expressed his personal frustration with the "quality of the people" in the MDC and hinted he may retire from politics if the MDC does not succeed in the 2008 elections. END SUMMARY.

Pressure Now on SAG and ZANU-PF in Talks

12. (C) Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) Treasurer Roy Bennett told PolOff September 28 that he is "cautiously optimistic" on the South African-led SADC facilitation between the MDC and ZANU-PF. Bennett admitted that he was initially skeptical about the inter-party agreement on Constitutional Amendment 18 (ref A), but MDC Secretary-General Tendai Biti convinced him that the MDC

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"made the right call." The MDC demonstrated good faith, and the pressure is now on South Africa and ZANU-PF to deliver the rest of the package, including the repeal of the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and the Access to Information and Privacy Protection Act (AIPPA), the return of political exiles (such as Bennett), instituting a truly independent electoral commission, and putting in place a new voter's roll. Mbeki hopes to conclude the talks no later than October 15, Biti told Bennett.

¶ 3. (C) The Tsvangirai faction of the MDC will pull out of the 2008 election if ZANU-PF does not agree to the reforms, Bennett said. (NOTE: He did not comment on whether the Mutambara faction of the MDC would also boycott. END NOTE.) Bennett argued that South Africa needs the MDC to participate for the elections to be legitimate, which gives the MDC leverage.

¶ 4. (C) According to Bennett, Mbeki told the MDC Presidents September 14-15 (ref B) that he suspected electoral support in Zimbabwe was split "50/50" between ZANU-PF and the MDC. Either could win, Mbeki suggested, emphasizing that the winner must be willing to work with the losing party. Bennett views this statement as Mbeki beginning to lay the groundwork for a government of national unity following the 2008 elections.

Mass Mobilization

¶ 5. (C) Bennett said he is urging Tsvangirai to begin "mass mobilization" of the people in the coming weeks. The party felt constrained by the ongoing SADC negotiations, but now that the talks are coming to a close, Bennett hoped that Tsvangirai would lead a series of marches to energize the

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people, such as a "march for jobs" or "march for free and fair elections." Tsvangirai is sympathetic to this idea, but Bennett is not sure how much planning has taken place.

MDC Fundraising

¶ 6. (C) Bennett admitted that raising funds for the MDC remains "very challenging." The party had earlier raised USD 1 million from a group of unnamed private investors (ref C).

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These funds had been used to fund party events, to pay salaries, and to purchase party vehicles in each province. Only USD 150,000 of the initial USD 1 million remains, and it is unclear whether the same donors will be willing to provide additional resources.

¶ 7. (C) The party has used some of the private funds to train a "close protection unit" for MDC President Tsvangirai. The training, which is being provided in South Africa by a private company called Delta One, is currently underway. Fourteen Zimbabweans started the training, although three have already been sent home. Bennett hopes that they will end up with an eight-person, well-trained unit to protect Tsvangirai during the election campaign.

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Weakness of Party

¶ 8. (C) Bennett spoke openly about the challenges facing the party, expressing his personal frustration with the "quality of the people" in the MDC. At the last party policy conference (ref D), Tsvangirai established clear timelines for the various committees to produce policy papers. This process was meant both to refine the party's policy positions and expose leaders who were not capable of delivering. Instead, Bennett said that Tsvangirai has let the timetable slip repeatedly with no consequence for the "non-performers." In part because of his growing frustration with the party and its lack of progress, Bennett admitted that he is considering leaving politics if the 2008 elections do not go well.

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